

 INTEGRATION

50 Action Points

A Plan for the Integration of Persons
entitled to Asylum or Subsidiary
Protection in Austria

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50 Action Points

A Plan for the Integration of Persons entitled to Asylum or Subsidiary Protection in Austria

Preamble

The integration of recognised refugees presents a growing challenge to safeguarding social cohesion and social peace in Austria. This is clearly reflected in the number of applications for asylum submitted over the last few years. While it stood at around 17,500 in 2013, this figure rose to some 28,000 in 2014. According to estimates by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, approximately 95,000 applications for asylum will be submitted by the end of 2015 and – if this trend continues – the number forecasted for 2016 will rise to about 100,000 to 130,000.

From an integration policy perspective this means that the number of persons entitled to asylum will thus increase. It is expected that asylum will be granted to between 20,000 and 25,000 persons in 2015. Furthermore, the number of family members who will come to Austria to join these refugees will also rise. While applications for family reunification stood at 2,000 in 2014, they are expected to increase to 7,500 by the end of this year. All these figures clearly illustrate that integration of recognised refugees in Austria is becoming an increasingly important issue and that there is urgent need for action.

The adoption of the National Action Plan for Integration (NAPI) in 2010 was a milestone in Austrian integration policy. One of its core elements is enshrining integration as an interdisciplinary, cross-cutting subject to be considered in all areas of life. Building on this logic, the NAPI defines seven fields of action: language and education, work and employment, rule of law and values, intercultural dialogue, health and social issues, sports and leisure, as well as housing and the regional dimension of integration. This structure facilitated not only a more accurate definition of the challenges involved but also the implementation of responses or solutions.

Against the background of the current situation, it is evident that the structure defined in the NAPI is also a very sensible approach to be adopted with respect to the integration of recognised refugees. What is required now are, likewise, measures at all levels, in keeping with the principle of subsidiarity in order to develop social framework conditions that enable the best-possible integration of refugees, without releasing them from their responsibility to undertake integration effort. To

this end it is, however, necessary to also push ideological debates aside and take the relevant measures that make it easier for persons entitled to asylum to “settle” in Austrian society.

Integration in general and integration of refugees in particular is a significant challenge, but at the same time also a task that can be structured and managed. It is a task that requires efforts to be undertaken by society as a whole and shall serve the public interest – but, however, not any particular special interests.

If Austria has learned anything from its integration history, then it is definitely the fact that integration is not something that happens by itself. The question of “where one has to integrate into” cannot be left to the individual’s discretion. The basic framework must be defined, communicated in a clear and transparent manner and accepted by all players.

From the immigrants’, and especially the refugees’, perspective Austria has – no doubt – a lot to offer. This giving on the part of the European welfare state gover-

ned by the rule of law is, however, linked with reciprocal obligations towards the state on the part of all residents including those who have newly arrived – both in the interests of the refugees themselves and of society at large. Integration is by no means a one-way street.

The objective of integration of persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection is that these individuals shall quickly be able to support themselves. It is about the refugees’ willingness to actively seek to progress and advance and contribute to society. Making a living without relying on state support as well as active participation in society at large must be the overriding goal of those entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection and the receiving society. It is only legitimate to expect such integration efforts and also that these shall be called for by the state.

The state in turn defines the framework conditions that facilitate undertaking such efforts towards successful integration – and this requires a clear and comprehensive plan.

50 Action Points

A Plan for the Integration of Persons entitled to Asylum or Subsidiary Protection in Austria

Table of Contents

Preamble.....	4
Fields of Action and Policy Recommendations.....	8
Language and Education.....	8
1. Second year of kindergarten, enhanced quality standards and more quality checks.....	8
2. Stronger link between mandatory year of kindergarten and language courses for mothers.....	9
3. Targeted language tuition at school: language support classes at school, language support courses after school and during school summer holidays.....	9
4. Comprehensive acquisition of skills by refugees who are no longer subject to compulsory schooling.....	10
5. Introduction of pedagogic intervention measures in the afternoon outside normal school hours.....	10
6. Using schools as platforms for sharing information on refugee integration.....	10
7. Social work in schools.....	10
8. Structured promotion of adult language skills.....	11
9. Supporting access to higher education.....	11
10. Targeted support to volunteers who provide German language tuition.....	11
Work and Employment.....	11
11. Comprehensive survey of available skills and qualifications.....	12
12. Recognition and professional licencing procedures: financial support.....	12
13. Vocational guidance for young refugees.....	12
14. Extended offer of vocation-specific technical language courses.....	13
15. Expanding support mechanisms for companies that foster their staff's acquisition of German skills.....	13
16. Increased deployment of persons completing national alternative or military service and Federal Army staff in refugee-related activities.....	13
17. Contact point for pro-active companies.....	13
18. Mentoring programme for pro-active refugees.....	14
The rule of law and values.....	14
19. Values and orientation courses.....	14
20. Acquiring language skills and an understanding of values.....	14
21. "Political education" as a subject taught in schools.....	15
22. Compulsory ethics lessons for pupils who opt out of religion classes.....	15
Health and social issues.....	16
23. "Integration plan" for receiving needs-based minimum income.....	16
24. Improving verbal communication in the healthcare sector.....	17
25. Strengthening mental health.....	17

26. Expansion of the services provided under the “Mother-Child-Booklet” (Mutter-Kind-Pass).....	17
27. Expansion and revision of examinations by school doctors.....	17
Intercultural Dialogue.....	18
28. Preventing radicalisation.....	18
29. Islam of a European notion.....	18
30. Measures against racism, anti-Semitism and hostility toward Islam.....	19
31. Authorised Community Representatives for the largest groups of origin.....	19
32. Information about religions in Austria.....	19
Sports and leisure.....	20
33. Further developing voluntary structures in the field of refugee integration.....	20
34. Values sponsorships.....	20
35. Promoting voluntary activity by persons completing compulsory national alternative or military service and Federal Army staff.....	20
36. Development of nationwide buddy systems in the fields of sports, leisure and education.....	21
37. Enhanced involvement of service clubs in refugee integration.....	21
38. Increased funding for integration projects under the Federal Sports Promotion Act.....	21
39. Earmarking of funds in the non-formal youth sector.....	22
40. Training facilitators active in the field of leisure activities.....	22
Housing and the regional dimension of integration.....	22
41. Strengthening political responsibility for integration, establishing municipal councillors for integration affairs.....	22
42. Provision of affordable housing.....	23
43. Early access to municipal and social housing against proof of integration progress...23	
44. Even regional distribution of refugees.....	23
45. Assistance in finding housing.....	24
General structural measures.....	24
46. More financial and human resources for integration.....	24
47. More staff for the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum (Bundesamt für Fremdenwesen und Asyl, BFA).....	24
48. Making better use of European Funds (synergy effects).....	24
49. Interlinking of statistical data.....	25
50. Accompanying academic research.....	25

50 Action Points

A Plan for the Integration of Persons entitled to Asylum or Subsidiary Protection in Austria

Fields of Action and Policy Recommendations

Building on the seven fields of action defined in the NAPI, this document presents measures for each of these fields, adapted to the special challenges of refugee integration, specified and prioritised in an implementation-oriented manner.

Owing to the cross-cutting nature of integration, the responsibilities for implementing these measures lie with a number of different bodies. Yet, they were deliberately conceived across the scopes of individual institutions.

The measures outlined in the following are directed both at the target group of recognised refugees and at the majority population.

Language and Education

Successful integration depends on a wide range of factors that relate to many different areas of life. It is, however, indisputable that German skills lay the groundwork for the successful interplay of these factors. In the context of integration of refugee children, adolescents and adults it is thus essential that German language instruction is provided in a structured and professional manner. Therefore educational institutions have a huge potential in creating the necessary framework conditions for both the swift acquisition of language skills and successful coexistence. Command of the national language forms the basis for successful integration in all areas of life.

Kindergarten

1. Second year of kindergarten, enhanced quality standards and more quality checks

Awareness is to be raised with regard to the role of child care institutions as first education institutions – because attending kindergarten is of key importance in the acquisition of social skills among all children. Common socialisation enables sharing of **fundamental values of coexistence** in kindergarten and promotes early contact with **German as the erudite language**. Refugee children in particular benefit from this. For children without a sufficient com-

mand of German (the erudite language) – as is the case with refugee children – a **mandatory second year of kindergarten** is to be introduced in order to ensure equal opportunities as they progress through the education system.

With a view to providing targeted support, the definition of **minimum quality standards** is considered pivotal – not only as regards training for all child care staff – but also with respect to, for instance, the requirements to be fulfilled when setting up and operating a “Kindergruppe” (parent-organised daycare centre) as well as the verification of compliance with such requirements.

Before setting up child care facilities it will be necessary to state whether and, if so, which specific beliefs or views are held by the establishment in question. The goal is to ensure that all **child care facilities embrace the values enshrined in the Austrian constitution** and that transparency is observed.

2. Stronger link between mandatory year of kindergarten and language courses for mothers

Their parents', and especially their mothers', German skills are especially important for children's educational careers and their active support. To this end, it is necessary to establish **enhanced coordination** between language classes for parents and their children's mandatory year of kindergarten. Ideally, it would thus be possible for mothers to attend German classes provided in the immediate vicinity of the kindergarten and held while their children are at kindergarten. This organisational measure makes it easier for mothers to actually attend German classes. Irrespective of whether their mothers acquire knowledge of the German language or not, attendance of the mandatory year at kindergarten remains a legal requirement. The implementation of these measures requires close coordination between the municipalities, the federal provinces and the major funding authorities active in the field of language instruction.

School system

3. Targeted language tuition at school: language support classes at school, language support courses after school and during school summer holidays

German skills are imperative for a successful educational career. Therefore it is necessary to continue and/or establish targeted German tuition at school. There are currently several regional approaches, which are to be enshrined in law. The establishment of preparatory language tuition formats would be of particular benefit for refugee children. In addition to **language support classes to be established mandatorily** during morning lessons, special mandatory **afternoon (after school) language support courses** are to be introduced. Such courses are inter alia directed at children who (no longer) attend language support class during morning lessons but require further language support. Special **mandatory language tuition summer classes** held during the school summer holidays or before school starts are to be introduced for all children who still display German language deficits after their final year at kindergarten. Such classes are also to be provided for those pupils who immigrate to Austria and are still required to attend compulsory education but join a class during the school year and lack sufficient German skills. In terms of implementation, attention is, however, always to be paid to the requirements and the opportunities of the respective schools.

Professional teachers who know how to manage the challenges of German as a second language are the prerequisite for the provision of targeted language tuition. Furthermore, language tuition and migration pedagogy must be included in teacher training curricula, as pupil's language skills are to be fostered in all lessons.

In order to meet current requirements, **retired teachers** are to be invited to **contribute to German tuition** of refugees in appropriate school formats.

50 Action Points

A Plan for the Integration of Persons entitled to Asylum or Subsidiary Protection in Austria

4. Comprehensive acquisition of skills by refugees who are no longer subject to compulsory schooling

Refugees, especially unaccompanied refugee minors who come to Austria and are **no longer subject to compulsory schooling**, often find it difficult to enter and/or integrate in the Austrian education system and/or labour market. From a legal point of view, it is however no longer possible to provide tuition for this group in the context of compulsory schooling.

Therefore it is necessary to further develop the **existing framework conditions** for this target group in order to enable them to acquire **more comprehensive skills within an extended period of time depending on the student's needs**.

5. Introduction of pedagogic intervention measures in the afternoon outside normal school hours

In an increasingly diverse society, schools have the important task of paying particular attention to discrimination, xenophobia and degradation processes. Austrian schools also need to be able to quickly recognise signs of racism and radicalisation. To this end, **pedagogic intervention measures** that take place **in the afternoon outside normal school hours** are to be introduced for those students who display radical or racist behaviour at school.

Such interventions are not only to enable the respective students to **reflect on their own behaviour** but should also have a **public interest** focus. The relevant activities may, for instance, include public interest services.

6. Using schools as platforms for sharing information on refugee integration

Children and young people have a lot of questions with respect to the current refugee movements. Schools should therefore address the ongoing discussions in a proactive manner and **based on data, facts and figures** they are to **raise students' awareness of and share evidence-based knowledge on the countries** their classmates with a refugee background come from. During regular lessons the underlying causes for the current crisis, the relevant historic developments, the political situation and everyday life in the refugees' countries of origin are to be discussed. To this end, schools are to be provided with appropriate teaching materials.

7. Social work in schools

Increasing diversity in Austrian schools also leads to conflicts arising from a cultural context between immigrant and domestic students, but likewise between immigrant students as conflicts they had faced in their home countries are sometimes not left behind but also transferred to school life here in Austria. It is to be assumed that the related potential for conflict will be further augmented by the current influx of refugees. Thus it is necessary to **increase the number of trained social workers in schools** in order to identify and defuse any **potential for conflict and violence**. What is more, children and young people with a refugee background will require increasing support in acclimatising to everyday life (at school). The scope of social workers' activities will therefore also include providing assistance in social learning in the classroom, confidence-building measu-

res, emergency meetings in case of crises, networking with parents, visits to pupils' homes, mediation and providing concrete assistance to children and families.

Adult education

8. Structured promotion of adult language skills

Currently there are various opportunities for refugees to attend German classes and receive relevant support. Coordination between the various providers is, however, poor. The acquisition of German language skills as the key to integration thus requires the **establishment of a structured cross-institutional approach** governing the provision of German classes. The leading bodies in the field of provision of basic welfare support to refugees (Federal Ministry of the Interior and federal provinces) and after asylum has been granted (Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs/Austrian Integration Fund, Federal Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection/Labour Market Service) are to ensure **promotion of German language skills in a coordinated manner**. This is the only viable approach to guarantee the efficient use of resources.

9. Supporting access to higher education

Some refugees want to study in Austria or resume studies which they were forced to stop because they fled their home countries. These refugees' potential should be used rather than lost as a result of institutional hurdles. The latter would, moreover, entail substantial consequential social costs for both those affected and society

at large – as one would otherwise have to start again at a later point and then focus on both language and skills. In order to enable these persons to enter and/or continue an academic career, it is necessary to **foster the resumption and completion of studies** refugees had already embarked on elsewhere. The recognition of academic degrees or the formal recognition of certificates required to obtain a degree is often not possible because the target group has either lost formal proof (diplomas, certificates) or was not able to take these documents with them. Universities and universities of applied sciences are therefore called upon to take the necessary **institutional measures** to enable a **fair resumption of previously commenced studies**.

Volunteer work in the field of German language tuition

10. Targeted support to volunteers who provide German language tuition

Language skills acquired in institutional settings are generally consolidated outside of class hours. **Committed people** who want to help refugees learn German and/or improve their German skills are to be supported in performing this task and are to be provided with opportunities to reflect on what they have experienced during lessons and to ask questions.

This includes, for instance, the provision of sufficient (teaching and studying) material and contact persons volunteers can turn to if they have questions.

50 Action Points

A Plan for the Integration of Persons entitled to Asylum or Subsidiary Protection in Austria

Work and Employment

Economic self-sufficiency is a sine qua non in a society based on solidarity. Swift labour market integration – as employee or as self-employed – of persons entitled to asylum and/or subsidiary protection is thus of pivotal importance to maintaining the Austrian social system.

Here too, the focus is again placed on support and obligations: Austria provides support in completing compulsory education at a later date, obtaining further skills and qualifications as required and also with respect to the recognition of professional qualifications so that recognised refugees can use their acquired skills and qualifications in the labour market and are able to make a living as soon as possible.

Targeted preparation enabling labour market entry without delay

11. Comprehensive survey of available skills and qualifications

Only when information on the skills and **qualifications of persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection is collected and made available in a timely and comprehensive manner** will it be possible to take appropriate measures towards preparing this target group for the labour market.

To this end, it is necessary to perform **skills checks** (as is currently being done in a pilot project in Vienna) and ensure that the relevant findings are made available nationwide in a standardised manner.

12. Recognition and professional licensing procedures: financial support

Gainful employment and employment in jobs appropriate one's to level of education and training are essential

steps towards integration and promote economic self-sufficiency. The recognition of previously acquired professional skills can be associated with various costs. Such costs may be related to incomplete documentation, inability to submit some of the required documents or alternative procedures required for the formal recognition of qualifications or the granting of professional licences.

This **financial aspect** must **not become an obstacle to the recognition of acquired skills and qualifications**.

After having performed a needs analysis, the responsible authorities are thus to provide **financial support** in the relevant proceedings.

Vocational guidance and job-specific language tuition

13. Vocational guidance for young refugees

Young people and young adults who are entitled to asylum and/or subsidiary pro-

tection have sometimes missed out on their education, have to make up for the periods of education lost or catch up on their training and therefore undergo **further qualification measures or basic education courses required to obtain a compulsory school leaving certificate in Austria.**

This phase (increasing the current level of education, completion of compulsory education) has to be used more intensively to promote targeted vocational guidance, provide career choices in the field of vocational education, and to foster exchange with local adolescents. This measure seeks to reduce the NEET rate among young people and to especially promote **sustainable integration in the labour market** of adolescent and young adult refugees.

14. Extended offer of vocation-specific technical language courses

Often vocational-specific technical language skills are a prerequisite for entering and successfully establishing oneself in the labour market.

It is therefore becoming increasingly important that – alongside those necessary for the acquisition of basic language skills – a sufficient range of **formats for the promotion of vocation-specific technical language skills** be established and that such formats be also integrated in a structured cross-institutional manner in existing funding structures, including European funding programmes.

15. Expanding support mechanisms for companies that foster their staff's acquisition of German skills

Currently there are only few incentives for companies to hire persons entitled to

asylum or to subsidiary protection whose command of German is poor.

This is also attributable to the fact that **language classes** are only tax-deductible as **operating and/or advertising expenses** when vocation-specific technical language instruction is provided. Language courses with a more general focus are, however, not deductible. A change in the **legal provisions** governing tax treatment and deductibility of such costs will also promote the acquisition of more general German skills in everyday working life.

Making increased use of existing structures

16. Increased deployment of persons completing national alternative or military service and Federal Army staff in refugee-related activities

Persons on alternative or military service and Federal Army staff make an **important contribution to society.** In the context of their activities they are to be increasingly deployed in the field of **refugee integration.** Depending on the area of activity and based on the relevant assignment, this may range from building accommodation facilities to care of refugees. Such activities will foster **the target group's trust in governmental institutions** and at the same time **strengthen mutual understanding.**

Accompanying measures

17. Contact point for pro-active companies

The number of companies that employ persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection is currently quite small. Alt-

50 Action Points

A Plan for the Integration of Persons entitled to Asylum or Subsidiary Protection in Austria

though this is to some extent attributable to lack of qualifications on the part of the target group, it is also related to the fact that so far companies have not had any experience with this group and/or have little information about the related challenges.

In order to enable the target group to enter the labour market without delay, it is necessary to **motivate** a sufficiently large number of companies to give these people a chance in the Austrian labour market. To this end, companies will be approached and dedicated information events will be organised.

18. Mentoring programme for pro-active refugees

Similar to existing mentoring programmes, recognised refugees who are not yet able to provide evidence of formal qualifications but demonstrate huge integration efforts (for instance by acquiring very good German skills within a short time, doing volunteer work etc.) should be given the opportunity to benefit from **intensive support by mentors from the business sector**. The ongoing project "mentoring for migrants" serves as model initiative in this context.

The rule of law and values

Integration of persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection highlights the need to communicate Austria's value system, which is based on constitutional law, in a comprehensive manner and from the very beginning. Austria has a sound and firmly established set of values that is not negotiable. An understanding of the binding values on which coexistence is based in Austria lays the groundwork for a successful integration process.

Learning spaces for value orientation in adult education

19. Values and orientation courses

A course format, specifically designed for initial orientation purposes, is to provide persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection with a good overview of life in Austria and the fundamental values governing coexistence (including democracy, rule of law, equality of men and women), but also with information on **social eti-**

quette and codes of conduct. They are to learn what society expects from them and what is not negotiable in order to enable **peaceful coexistence of all people** in Austria. The degree of integration (including language skills, knowledge of values and social order) is also taken account of in the context of return procedures.

20. Acquiring language skills and an understanding of values

The ongoing further development of formats for **conveying values** means that an

even stronger focus has to be placed on integrating values **into language training formats**. Such formats will thus not only serve the provision of language skills but also the communication of values and expected patterns of social behaviour when interacting with others. Language training must be understood even more clearly as values training and be implemented as such. This raises the target group's awareness of the fundamental principles and **all rights and duties of equitable and peaceful coexistence**. It thus enables appreciation of these fundamental values and freedoms – including the respective limits – to be strengthened and will consequently also increase loyalty towards Austria.

Learning spaces for value orientation in schools

21. “Political education” as a subject taught in schools

As a result of the current refugee movements, an increasing number of students who come from regions with sometimes very diverging fundamental attitudes towards community life are entering our school system and will continue to do so. An increasingly pluralist society raises a number of questions related to coexistence. It is necessary to ensure early communication of **value systems relating to democracy, human rights and peaceful coexistence based on mutual responsibility**.

The definition of this new priority is highlighted by the introduction of “political education” as a mandatory subject to be taught in schools.

Elements of “political education” are also to be integrated **in basic education courses required to obtain a compulsory school leaving certificate**.

As such courses are often attended by unaccompanied refugee minors, a stronger focus on values orientation may also be placed in this context.

22. Compulsory ethics lessons for pupils who opt out of religion classes

Religion classes taught in schools offer a lot of room to address – in the light of the respective religion – various **ethical principles** in a comprehensive manner.

In order to ensure that all **students** including those who do **not attend religion classes** or have opted out, give proper consideration to these issues, **compulsory ethics lessons** are to be set up for this group. This would be especially important for pupils from other cultural backgrounds such as refugee children.

50 Action Points

A Plan for the Integration of Persons entitled to Asylum or Subsidiary Protection in Austria

Health and social issues

A person's state of health influences his or her participation in society in general, and in the educational system and the labour market in particular. If the number of years spent in good health and a person's well-being in general are increased, this will have a positive impact on the labour market, the use of social services and benefits as well as on educational success, thus increasing the »social return on investment«.

The overarching goal is to enable persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection to participate without undue delay in the labour market and in economic life in the best possible manner and as early as possible. To this end, it is indispensable to support the improvement and maintenance of the target group's health in the best possible manner right from the start.

In this context a special focus is to be placed on strengthening health literacy, health promotion and the concept of preventative healthcare. This approach enables potentially long-term impacts to be avoided which may, in turn, translate into cost savings in the health and social security system. Against this background, a special focus is to be placed on the target group's psychological health.

Early participation in economic life and financial independence as overarching goals

23. "Integration plan" for receiving needs-based minimum income

In order to enable persons entitled to asylum and subsidiary protection to enter the labour market as soon as possible, efficient referral to necessary training measures is to be ensured based on specific and mandatory **support agreements**, which are defined in the context of an individualised "integration plan".

If the individual refuses to observe the integration plan (i.e. to participate in certain courses, for instance) this will lead to cuts in the needs-based minimum income. It is clear that due to parental supervision ob-

ligations one parent cannot enter the labour market as quickly as the other. It is nevertheless considered conducive that persons of legal age who are part of a joint household develop in cooperation with the competent authority an "integration plan" as a tailored support agreement.

This enables initial **necessary integration measures** (such as German language courses, values and orientation courses) to be offered at an early stage and the person to be prepared for entering and integrating in the labour market at a later point in time. The **needs-based minimum benefit** system is to be increasingly understood as a pedagogic instrument that enables transition to a life in which one is no longer dependent on transfer services, thus putting the concept of capacity-building by "helping people to help themselves" into practice.

Improving health and medical care

24. Improving verbal communication in the healthcare sector

In the context of healthcare provision, poor communication may have a costly long-term impact. Therefore **interpreting initiatives** are to be developed and expanded to enable the more targeted and effective provision of medical care for refugees especially in the field of acute care. Existing IT based systems which enable access to a central pool of interpreters will be expanded and used more efficiently. Furthermore, medical staff's existing **language skills** are to be used in a targeted manner and specialised staff from the target group are to be hired.

25. Strengthening mental health

It is to be assumed that numerous persons with a refugee background – irrespective of their age – may suffer from mental health problems because of their traumatic experiences. In order to overcome these experiences they often require psychotherapeutic care. Early treatment facilitates integration in the target country. It is therefore necessary to drive the broad-based development of measures aimed at promoting mental health and to ensure the availability of sufficient multi-lingual specialised staff.

26. Expansion of the services provided under the “Mother-Child-Booklet” (Mutter-Kind-Pass)

Many mothers from countries like Syria, Afghanistan or Iraq are not aware of the

Mother-Child-Programme (consisting of compulsory free of charge medical examinations during pregnancy and until the child reaches the age of five). It is thus considered necessary to provide an understanding of the services provided under the “Mother-Child-Booklet” to this target group immediately after their arrival in order to be able to identify potential health risks for mothers or children as early as possible. Furthermore, it is considered generally necessary to subject the “Mother-Child-Booklet” in its current form to a large-scale reform.

An expansion of the range of examinations that are already necessary as part of its current programme (psychosocial factors) as well as early initial examinations – while at the same time providing for sanctions (reduction or withdrawal of child care allowance if the mother does not participate in the programme). Linking of the programme with healthcare examinations provided under the school physician system is also considered useful in order to enable more broad-based health monitoring.

27. Expansion and revision of examinations by school doctors

Childhood and youth are important stages of life with respect to a person's health (literacy), as they influence behaviour patterns in later life. Numerous reports indicate that there is a clear need for health policy action directed at children and adolescents subject to compulsory schooling (which is also very relevant for children and young people with a migration or refugee background).

It is thus necessary to increasingly include psychological measures in the context

50 Action Points

A Plan for the Integration of Persons entitled to Asylum or Subsidiary Protection in Austria

of examinations by school doctors and to generally increase the number of mandatory examinations by school doctors. Furthermore, the focus should be placed on cooperation between social workers in schools and on interlinking with the results produced in the context of examinations under the "Mother-Child-Booklet" programme and/or examinations under

the planned "Child and Youth Booklet". The goal should be a nationwide uniform quality standard for medical examinations. The findings generated by medical examinations conducted by school doctors and the relevant data are to be collected for statistical purposes with a view to developing targeted prevention measures in the healthcare sector.

Intercultural Dialogue

Intercultural dialogue has a long tradition in Austria. It is a prerequisite of peaceful co-existence that people with different cultural backgrounds and traditions, views and religious beliefs reach out to one another. Intercultural dialogue must be conducted on an equal footing, characterised by mutual respect and based on mutual appreciation. This enables the elimination of fears and prejudice. The deliberate denial of our values must not be accepted as a result of misunderstood tolerance.

Preventive action to counter radicalisation

28. Preventing radicalisation

Depending on migrants' socio-cultural background, migration experiences lead to identity conflicts of varying scope, which may also have an impact over several generations and in some cases may even become more pronounced. The risk of slipping into radicalisation is particularly high during such phases of identity change.

The young people who travel from Austria to Syria to join the "jihad" mainly have a refugee background or are second generation migrants. Therefore a wide range of measures and an approach that includes society at large must be taken in order to

prevent **tendencies towards radicalisation at all levels**. Furthermore, it is necessary to establish a **counter-narrative**. Dismantling the underlying ideology is an effective tool for de-radicalisation and prevention of radicalisation in the first place. Particularly **organisations with an Islamic background** focus on gaining the support of refugees for their agenda. It is necessary to **monitor** their activities **more closely** and if necessary **counter** such activities **at all social levels**.

29. Islam of a European notion

The promotion of **Islam of a European notion** in line with the **Austrian constitution and European fundamental values** enables a context-oriented Islam that takes

account of the living environments of Muslims in Austria. In this connection it must be underlined that there is no such thing as a homogenous Islam or “the Muslims” as a homogenous social group. About six % of the overall Austrian population are Muslims, more than half of them are Austrian citizens. Hence there is a major need for academic discourse and an inner-Islamic debate. The **creation of Islamic-theological chairs at universities can make an important contribution** in this context.

30. Measures against racism, anti-Semitism and hostility toward Islam

The latest pictures of unchecked immigration are a source of concern, fear and prejudice in mainstream society. They translate – especially in the Internet – in sometimes overt racism vis-à-vis refugees, between individual groups of refugees and also vis-à-vis established social groups in society (for instance anti-Semitism).

It is therefore necessary to intensify **measures aimed at countering racism in general and anti-Semitism and hostility toward Islam** in particular. To this end **all means provided under the rule of law** must be used. Furthermore, increased dialogue among Abrahamic religions is also deemed sensible to place the focus on what unites them rather than on what divides them.

Knowledge transfer

31. Authorised Community Representatives for the largest groups of origin

Many migrants and refugees lack specific knowledge about the target country

Austria, which was often chosen more or less by chance. Prominent figures from the respective communities who have lived in Austria for some time may assume an important bridge function as Authorised Community Representatives (Bürgerbeauftragte).

They can explain Austria’s specific character, its history and the underlying concept and principles of the state of Austria to their own community.

As **role models**, such Authorised Community Representatives are able to share their **own and others’ personal “stories” of successful integration**. These Authorised Community Representatives are to be coordinated by the Austrian Integration Fund.

32. Information about religions in Austria

In Austria, there are 16 recognised religious communities and a number of other religious denomination communities. In the context of **comprehensive values education**, information on religion law in Austria is also to be provided.

At a very early stage it will thus be made clear that **religions coexist peacefully** in Austria. It must also be clearly explained where the state governed by the rule of law sets clear limits on the free exercise of religion.

50 Action Points

A Plan for the Integration of Persons entitled to Asylum or Subsidiary Protection in Austria

Sports and leisure

Alongside its structural level, the social level of integration is becoming increasingly important. In the past and also during these last few weeks, great solidarity has been shown in Austria. It is necessary to support volunteers not only when providing assistance at short notice and in emergency situations, but especially in the context of long-term commitment and activities in the field of integration. At the same time, the sustainable inclusion of immigrants in volunteer work and their feeling of belonging will also be strengthened.

Voluntary Work

33. Further developing voluntary structures in the field of refugee integration

Austrians are very active in the voluntary sector. This readiness to engage in voluntary activity is based on a deep feeling of responsibility and solidarity. The increasing number of refugees brings new challenges for this voluntary dedication.

The state therefore has to make available efficient structures and know-how to support voluntary commitment, accompany it, provide supervision and generally enhance recognition and status of voluntary activity. It is therefore imperative that, alongside short-term assistance, the focus be placed on developing long-term integration support. Through this backing and support of civil society, a long-term perspective is offered to voluntary activity.

This includes *inter alia* **stronger inter-linking between volunteers and non-governmental institutions**, recognition of voluntary activities as a qualification criterion in public tenders, **tax deductibility** of donations, and of membership fees paid

to non-profit associations with integration agenda, as well as the inclusion of integration in the list of non-profit activities under the Federal Fiscal Code.

34. Values sponsorships

Opportunities are to be provided for the target group to **experience, learn about and adopt values**, for instance through a common project with volunteers in the context of which places that are of importance visited, such as Parliament, and their pivotal role is explained and discussed by all participants.

35. Promoting voluntary activity by persons completing compulsory national alternative or military service and Federal Army staff

In the context of their activities, persons completing compulsory national alternative or military service and Federal Army staff acquire many skills and competences which may prove very beneficial in the field of voluntary integration assistance (for instance in the social, intercultural and logistics areas). It is therefore necessary that these groups based on **specific, tailored**

measures be more closely involved in **voluntary activity**. It is to be assumed that – due to similar age structures – trust can be built relatively quickly among **persons completing national alternative or military service and the target group**. To this end, **incentives** to engage more in voluntary activities are to be created which could include granting special days off or consideration of voluntary activities when assigning these persons to service posts.

36. Development of nationwide buddy systems in the fields of sports, leisure and education

The field of **education and the entire sports and leisure sector** provide a wide range of opportunities for encounters between persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection and the majority population. Such accounts often take place in the context of voluntary activities and offer substantial **potential for integration**. By assuming mentorships for refugees, mentors are able to **share values on a hands-on basis**, which will contribute to the **early promotion of young persons' voluntary commitment**. Such **buddy systems** could also be used to raise refugees' levels of education and assist them in learning and acquiring new content.

Associations could introduce buddy systems in order to introduce the target group with a refugee background to leisure activities and help them to establish social contacts. **Educational institutions or associations** that are particularly committed in this area could be rewarded by winning grants, distinctions or **prizes**. Specific encounters between young people and older persons could prove mutually beneficial.

Older persons, on the one hand, learn to assume responsibility for others, while they could serve as examples for younger persons who, on the other hand, could gain confidence and learn who to turn to if they have questions. Establishing such buddy systems not only within institutions, but also, based on cooperation, between different facilities by developing joint activities aimed at promoting community spirit should also be considered.

37. Enhanced involvement of service clubs in refugee integration

Service clubs that enjoy **good relations within business and industry** are to be involved more **closely in refugee integration**, especially in cooperation with language training providers (such as the Austrian Integration Fund). The goal is to define a group which is granted the necessary language training and is then via a non-profit organisation awarded internships lasting approximately three to six months. The non-profit association will act as the central contact point for employers and recognised refugees.

Establishing integration more firmly in the fields of sports and leisure

38. Increased funding for integration projects under the Federal Sports Promotion Act

Against the background of the challenges, **minimum funding for integration projects** of EUR 200,000 under the programme operated by the Austrian Federal Sports Promotion Fund is too low. Thus it is suggested that funding be increased to

50 Action Points

A Plan for the Integration of Persons entitled to Asylum or Subsidiary Protection in Austria

at least EUR 500,000. The objective is to give further encouragement to sports institutions to adopt an integrative approach while at the same time supporting them in their related efforts.

39. Earmarking of funds in the non-formal youth sector

Under the Federal Youth Promotion Act, an **earmarked share of funding** provided to institutions of non-formal/extra-curricular youth education and **youth work** is to be allocated to the area of integration. Again,

the goal is to encourage these institutions to develop an integrative approach.

40. Training facilitators active in the field of leisure activities

Persons belonging to the majority society are to acquire the necessary skills that enable them to facilitate and promote **successful encounters involving members of all groups**.

This will enable all group members to establish contacts, build up social confidence and eliminate prejudice.

Housing and the regional dimension of integration

Housing policy and integration activities must be closely interlinked. Integration starts in a person's immediate environment, directly where he or she lives, in the neighbourhood, in the community, in the towns and cities. Conurbations and metropolitan areas in particular are faced with the challenge of ensuring social and ethnic balance among inhabitants in order to minimise factors that pose an impediment to integration. Segregation is to be countered by a balanced distribution of refugees across Austria and via standardised access to social housing.

Defining political responsibilities for integration at community level

41. Strengthening political responsibility for integration, establishing municipal councillors for integration affairs

For many municipalities, integration is a new topic they had rarely been confronted

with or one they have so far not had any experience of dealing with at all. It is therefore necessary that **municipalities** become fully aware of the scope and role played by integration and thus establish the necessary **political responsibilities**. Hence it is necessary to define the portfolio of "integration" and integration-related responsibilities to be assumed by the mayor or by **municipal councillors for integration affairs**. Municipalities must,

however, not be left alone with this “new” responsibility for integration matters. Together with the federal provinces they are to be involved in the related nationwide efforts and to be provided with **information opportunities** and **supported via information fora**. The relevant activities include raising awareness among mayors and municipal councillors for integration affairs of their responsibility and providing initial orientation counselling and assistance.

Improving the housing situation

42. Provision of affordable housing

The current situation makes it more evident than ever that there is **huge need for affordable housing**, especially in Austria’s conurbations. The creation of such affordable housing would be of major importance not only for recognised **refugees but also for the receiving society**.

It is not necessary to specifically highlight the fact that this is a major issue. After all, the call for affordable housing is not only associated with rising demand for housing triggered by the growing number of households, but also with real estate prices, spatial planning, building codes and the increasing scope of requirements to be fulfilled under these provisions as well as higher demands for quality. In view of the large number of persons entitled to protection who are expected to stay permanently in Austria, it is necessary to step up new construction activities in good time in order to avoid a housing shortage, which will also affect anyone with limited financial means. At the same time this demand is to be met by the more efficient use of existing housing space in rural areas.

43. Early access to municipal and social housing against proof of integration progress

In many cities and municipalities, persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection currently do not have early access to low-cost municipal and/or social housing (due to de facto hurdles). Subject to **proof of integration progress** or **verifiable integration efforts** (such as German skills, understanding of the Austrian value system and social order), recognised refugees are to be granted early access to subsidised housing throughout Austria.

The pivotal role of German language skills as a tool against segregation in the field of housing and a life on the fringe of Austrian society as well as its bridge function in terms of conflict resolution cannot be emphasised enough.

44. Even regional distribution of refugees

In order to enable persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection to integrate as quickly as possible, efforts must be undertaken to promote the target group’s settlement in rural regions and to achieve a **balanced distribution within Austria**.

In this context attention should be drawn to the fact that housing prices have increased substantially in conurbations and will continue to rise, which is not conducive to integrating the target group.

It is furthermore a well-known fact that **people integrate faster in the immediate neighbourhood** as it is easier to establish social contacts here than in larger urban contexts.

50 Action Points

A Plan for the Integration of Persons entitled to Asylum or Subsidiary Protection in Austria

45. Assistance in finding housing

Often persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection are very unlikely or have no chance at all of getting access to social housing. This is why they have to find appropriate accommodation on the private housing market. **Online platforms (property pages)** may prove helpful in enabling apartments to be rented by private individuals to the target group.

Seeking accommodation on the private housing market, however, carries the risk that due to limited financial resources the

target group may in some private accommodation be subject to overcrowding and/or pays an inappropriate amount of rent due to lack of knowledge about rental prices and potential legal structuring of rental contracts.

This is why assistance is to be provided to persons entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection with respect to issues related to the private housing market, since the housing environment has a major impact on a person's further integration process and his or her ability to integrate.

General structural measures

In order to be able to properly manage the future challenges in integration work, sufficient structural prerequisites must be in place. Alongside financial and personal resources this also includes scientific evidence based on which it is possible to launch new measures. This is the only way to ensure targeted, effective and sustainable action.

Increasing resources

46. More financial and human resources for integration

In order to be able to meet current and future integration challenges it is necessary to increase numbers of staff and financial resources in the field of **integration** of recognised refugees.

Existing structures are currently being stretched to their limits. If the influx of refugees continues at current levels they will thus no longer be able to ensure early, comprehensive and seamless integration.

47. More staff for the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum (Bundesamt für Fremdenwesen und Asyl, BFA)

Although the BFA has already hired more staff, processing times will increase substantially due to the enormous rise in applications for asylum.

It is thus imperative to further **raise staffing levels** at the BFA in order to enable **quick process handling** and integration.

48. Making better use of European Funds (synergy effects)

The EU provides **several funding mechanisms** to be used for measures in the field of refugee integration. Alongside the AMIF (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund) which focuses on this area, better use is to be made in particular of the ESF (European Social Fund), which focuses specifically on labour market measures. **Enhanced cooperation** among the bodies that administer these funds will enable better use of **synergy effects**.

Scientific process support

49. Interlinking of statistical data

A number of institutions are active in the field of refugees and persons entitled to asylum, including federal ministries, province institutions, the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum and the Austrian Labour Service. Only on rare instances is data, which is held by the individual bodies, consolidated and shared across institutions. Improved **statistical recording** will contribute towards **identifying hurdles in the integration process** and serve as an **evaluation tool**.

As reflected in Austrian integration policy over the last few years, data **transparency** can not only contribute towards promoting the efficient use of financial means but also towards dismantling and eliminating distorted images fed to the public by the mass media.

50. Accompanying academic research

There is currently a lack of comprehensive surveys on the issue of refugees. With a view to gaining a better understanding of recognised refugees' perspectives of life,

their expectations, their attitudes towards government and society as well as their relationship with their countries of origin, more primary research is required.

Likewise, it is necessary to review the success of measures taken throughout the process. Scientific analyses will thus contribute to initiating new programmes and evaluating existing ones.



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